

The Gathering Church
Dan Ferguson message 8/30/26

My Story Matters
Discovering Who I am
Deepening My Journey
Seeing God in Every Step

In His Image
Live in Mystery
Why Do I
Fully Be Yourself
I Am Enough
Who Am I
This is Me

Getting to know each other's story

Listening to Your Life

When we take time to ask the question, "Where have I seen Jesus in my life?", we are asking a very important question.

Every time we pick up the Bible and read the stories of the people of the Bible, we are asking multiple things and among them are these questions:

- Where did the people of the Bible see God in their life,
- Where was the intersection of their stories and Jesus.
- Where in the stories of the Bible do we hear a part of our stories being told?

Debbie, in telling her story last week, shared how her journey with hard trials and anger, intersected with some similarities in Jacob's life.

A life well lived is a life well listened to. Are you listening to your life?

- Are you listening to the lives of those who lived in the stories of the bible?
- Are you listening to the lives of those that have lived and are living around us these days?
- And can you find Jesus in the complexities of circumstances in the playing out of your story?

Or is it all just meaningless? ... We do the I best we can to make sense of these mysterious lives and then we tuck it all in and wait for heaven?

Eugene Peterson wrote a book entitled ***"Christ plays in Ten Thousand places."***

One of Peterson's themes in his writings is that **God is already present in the story of a person's life.**
How do we know that? God is omnipresent. He is everywhere.

He is working in:

- the things we understand
- the things we don't understand
- our gifts and abilities
- our relationships
- In our disappointments
- In our ordinary routines
- In our failures
- At every unexpected turn

- In places we never intended to be

He is more present than we can imagine. In our last series we said, *"God is closer to you than you are to yourself."*

Peterson says, *"We aren't writing our story and then asking God to come along afterward and bless it. God is already there."*

SONG. "And He walks with me and He talks with me and he tells me that I am His own, and the voice I hear falling on mine ear none other has ever known." "In The Garden" by Austin Miles 1912

Can you Give Testimony to His Presence in Your Life?

If we can't give testimony to God's movement or working in our lives I think we need to question, **am I living the Christian life.**

The truth is God is involved in our lives whether we see it or not. His story matters and the stories of the people we read in the bible matter, because in their stories we should be noticing parts of our stories.

Have you ever listened to someone's story or read a story in the Bible and had any of these responses

- "I've felt that."
- "I've been afraid of that."
- "I've experienced that loss."
- "I've wondered where God was too."

My point this morning is we need to open our eyes and ears to the stories being told in our life and the lives around us.

(TEARS) I've shared this thought: when people struggle with releasing tears or start to apologize to me for crying, I often see these moments as sacred moments where heaven meets earth. *(Had one this last week in the Intensive Care Unit with a family I was supporting.)*

I will often say, "Have you ever wondered why tears come out of our eyes? They could pour out of any part of our body, but God chose the eyes. Why did he do that? The seat of our emotions starts in our hearts, but it comes out our face every time. Not just tears but every other emotion. But why tears?

Because tears are meant to be seen. Seen by God and seen by others. And often our tears are telling us something and then I share this statement from a poet.

TEARS – by Frederick Buechner

YOU NEVER KNOW what may cause them. The sight of the Atlantic Ocean can do it, or a piece of music, or a face you've never seen before. A pair of somebody's old shoes can do it..., a horse cantering across a meadow, the high school basketball team running out onto the gym floor at the start of a game. You can never be sure. But of this you can be sure. Whenever you find tears in your eyes, especially unexpected tears, it is well to pay the closest attention.

They are not only telling you something about the secret of who you are, but more often than not God is speaking to you through them of the mystery of where you have come from and is summoning you to where, if your soul is to be saved, you should go to next.

The God of the universe is speaking to me. Am I listening to my life or maybe like me, you have been too busy trying to be someone else than God has made you.

What's My Story - "Wanting my Story to Matter"

Be-setting sin .. Envy, comparison, not being okay with how God has made you.

What Envy Means for a Type 4 (This is my Enneagram type – see *personality.com to do an Enneagram test*)

- **The Sense of Deficit:** Type 4s operate from a core belief that other people possess an ease, wholeness, or connection to life that they themselves lack.
- **The Focus is on the Unobtainable:** Their attention naturally drifts toward what is missing, leading them to idealize what others have while devaluing their own present reality.
- **Comparison Over Competition:** Instead of aggressively competing with others, Fours constantly compare themselves and conclude that they fall short.

Ways this showed up in my life . . .

- Worried about how I stacked up to others... always asking am I good enough. (*Ex. Mom being called in by a high school teacher who thought it strange that I was always asking kids what they scored on their quizzes or test.*)
- Being good at a lot of things but not being the best and always wanting to be the best. I was "*a jack of all trades, master of none.*" (*Picture of me on the piano*) Wanting to be the next DINO. Wanting to have Chris Tomlin's voice.
- Aspiring to church leadership but never seeming to arrive where "*I wanted to get to.*"

The crazy part of my story is that I was consistently aspiring and gifted to leadership and being in front of people as a performer and teacher, but the enemy knew how to constantly remind me that I would never be good enough.

I'll never forget being in front a packed crowd at a Christian Basketball league end of the year ceremony and was asked to give an invitation to receive Christ. I stumbled over reciting John 3:16 and the audience had to help me. I left the stage quite mortified.

I was consistently looking for affirmation from others instead of just resting in who God had made me and shaking off failures.

Failures instead were a reminder that I didn't measure up.

(Ultimate Leadership Conference Story)

I remember going to a leadership conference in California that Richard Lord sent me to as a minister at our former church, and part of the conference was taking time each day with other leaders (*Who we had not known prior to being on this trip*) telling our stories for hours.

I was amazed at how, when people shared their stories, God would take me to some places in 'my story'. He started to do a deep work of restoration in some places in my life that I hadn't thought about for years. As I told stories and people felt something for me that I couldn't feel for myself, God came in and started lifting some of the grave clothes off of me.

I remember getting on the plane on my way home from that trip with the song "Amazing Grace": "*My chains are gone I have been set free, my God my savior has ransomed me and like a flood his mercy reigns unending love, amazing grace.*" And tears began rolling down my face.

I think in many ways I felt saved from my own prison of envy and jealousy I had put myself in. When the grave clothes started to come off, the eyes shifted from myself to others. I had a hunger to listen to my life and the lives of others with a Holy Spirit curiosity.

And I remember this one truth; when we begin to share some of the hardest parts of our stories with each other, the places we have felt the weakest, we will be surprised to see that **"Our Stories are more alike than they are different."**

The sad part of giving in to your fallen nature (sin) is that you never really live your life and appreciate the things God has gifted you to do.

(Am I dumb?) One of my students asked me two weeks ago when they were struggling with some math problems; She asked, **"Mr. Ferguson are some people just Dumb?"** Everyone laughed a little bit, but it was a serious question.

It made me think about the study we had just finished at the church that we are made in the image of Him. And underneath all the messiness of our fractured life there is an image of Him that is beautiful.

My Response to her was a question, **"Is God dumb?"** Immediately she said no. So I said, **"If we are made in his image, none of us are dumb."**

Each of us have extreme value and the more I am able to rest in who he has made me to be, the less I have to look outward to find my worth. I still struggle with envy, (*It came roaring back this last week*), but it doesn't have a hold over me like it once had.

(Biblical Integration of Envy/ Jealousy). If you looked in the Bible for some stories that resonate with my struggles it would be Cain and Saul. Cain was jealous that God accepted Ables sacrifice and not his. In his anger he had to diminish others to make himself feel better. Saul was jealous of David. Saul, although being King, was a weak King and even though God had gifted him with leadership he was always looking

around for who would replace him next. He too became focused on removing those he compared himself to.

Mystery – by Frederick Buechner - Originally published in *Wishful Thinking* and later in *Beyond Words*

THERE ARE MYSTERIES you can solve by taking thought. For instance, a murder mystery whose mysteriousness must be dispelled in order for the truth to be known.

*There are other mysteries that do not conceal a truth to think your way to, but whose truth is itself the mystery. **The mystery of your self, for example.** The more you try to fathom it, the more fathomless it is revealed to be. No matter how much of your self you are able to objectify and examine, the quintessential, living part of your self will always elude you, that is, the part that is conducting the examination. **Thus you do not solve the mystery, you live the mystery. And you do that not by fully knowing yourself, but by fully being yourself.***

To say that God is a mystery is to say that you can never nail him down. Even on Christ the nails proved ultimately ineffective.

So the current mystery of myself that I am learning to live into, is that **I am first and foremost a beloved child of God.** I don't have to do anything to get my Savior to love me anymore. I can't escape his love. So I am learning to rest in His love.

I have been **given a gift to pastor and to lead the church.** Within that pastoral gifting I have a **gift of music and worship** and love to release my song to the Lord and, when I do in the company of His saints, His spirit is released in my life.

I am a **teacher**, right now I teach two disciplines, **theology and math.** Both speak of the greatness of our God. Somehow in God's foreknowledge he led me to get a Math degree for reasons I did not know 30 years ago and for much of my adult existence it has **been a mystery** to understand what the math degree was for in the first place. I entered the math classroom twice vocationally and each time I left saying that's not for me, but this last year God has changed the story on me. Needing to work bi-vocationally, I found a Christian school in town in need of a part-time teacher, and it **has been one of the joys of my life recently.** Who knew, God knew what he was doing way back then, even when I didn't. That is living into the mystery.

Becoming more and more confident that God is in control of my life and my story does matter even if I cannot see it right now.